Compared to medical diagnoses, where do you think there are deficits in workups for psychiatric diagnoses?

Dr. Northoff:

Go into cardiology and cancer medicine. You come, you see the doctor for half an hour, and the nurse, and then you have two or three days of diagnostics.

You get an EKG, you get an x-ray, you get an ultrasound, you get a cardiac challenge test, you get all kinds of blood stuff, you get all kinds of x-rays, you get an MRI, then you get a diagnostic. And then you can make a personalized therapy. For instance, now in cancer medicine, they try to really determine the antibody, and say they do an immunological vaccine for the cancer. So it's BioNTech — the company which did the Pfizer vaccine. So this is really precision-based personalized medicine.

What can we do in psychiatry? Nothing. We have no clear diagnostic criteria. No objective markers. No personalized therapy. I'm sorry to sketch it as harsh as I do. And we are trying now, based on this, we have developed a spatial template model of psychiatric disorders. Catatonia is one. Depression is, for instance, a speed disturbance. The brain is too slow. The emotions are too slow. The thoughts are too slow. You can't imagine the resistance, and we developed certain diagnostic markers for that: EEG, rating scales, fMRI. You can't imagine the resistance of people just to insert a half-hour diagnostic challenge. It's unbelievable.

We really need to change our attitude if we want psychiatric therapy and diagnostics to be better. More personalized, more effective, and in tune with the standards of other branches of medicine. I'm sorry to say it as clearly and harshly, but I put my full weight on that.

And insurance companies have to change. Why? Because they pay much more money if the patient enters a myriad labyrinth of the different health professionals, different offices, pharmacological, non-pharmacological psychotherapy. It's a huge market, where people have a lot of slices in the pie, and nobody wants to give that up. That really has to change.